

Hurricane Katrina: The Iraq War Comes to the U.S.



The tempo of events is accelerating. The 2000 election; September 11; the implosion of Enron; the Iraq War and occupation; all these events have marked points of inflection in the rapidly changing consciousness of the American working class. Over the last five years, millions have begun to question the very system they are forced to live under - a system of constant and increasing instability. Now another shock has come, this time in the form of a natural disaster, compounded dramatically by the government's incompetence and disdain for the poorest and most downtrodden in American society.

Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath violently exposed the pent-up contradictions of decades of poverty, exploitation, and racism. From the beginning, we have explained that the so-called "war on terror" is a war on working people at home and abroad. Nothing made that more evident than the gross negligence and criminal contempt for human life we witnessed in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. A full week after hurricane Katrina ravaged the U.S. Gulf Coast, thousands remained trapped in squalor and despair. This killer storm did not simply break through the levees surrounding New Orleans; it smashed through the psychological inertia of millions of Americans: no longer do they have blind faith in the government's ability to protect them.

As in Iraq, it is Bush's cronies who are getting the major contracts to rebuild New Orleans. In other words, millions if not billions in workers' tax dollars will go to pad the wallets of Bush and co.'s biggest political supporters. Even Blackwater security, the mercenaries responsible for Abu Ghraib are patrolling the streets of the Big Easy. This is business as usual in capitalist America. What is needed is a massive program of public works to create jobs for the people of the Gulf Coast. They can then build quality housing, schools, hospitals and infrastructure themselves. There is no need for a "middle man" pocketing mega-profits that could instead be used to directly improve the lives of those most affected by this calamity. All the Federal and charity money earmarked for Katrina relief should be under the democratic control of the people, not for-profit corporations.

Katrina will have far-reaching implications in the coming months and years. The anger against Bush and the government of both corporate parties will eventually be turned against the very system that produces these horrors. As always in nature and society, things change constantly, and even the most reactionary situation can turn into its opposite literally overnight. At the beginning of Bush's

second term, we wrote the following lines: "After his re-election, many feared the worst - that G.W. truly had a 'mandate' and would use his 'political capital' to force through his agenda without any opposition. But the reality is that by the end of his second term, Bush will regret having run for re-election in the first place."

Just a few months later, this prediction is already coming true. Bush's approval ratings are the lowest they have ever been - less than 40 percent. The economy is in trouble and the Iraq War drags endlessly on. Even before the Katrina debacle, Cindy Sheehan's vigil outside Bush's Crawford, TX ranch had galvanized and re-energized the anti-war movement. For the first time since it began, the majority opposes the Iraqi war and occupation. And for the first time since 9/11, the majority feels that domestic issues are more important than the "war on terror".

These changing attitudes in part reflect the growing awareness that things here at home are not getting any better, that this is indeed "as good as it gets". The economic situation for most Americans continues to worsen, with polarization of wealth at all time highs. Gasoline prices have gone through the roof, and this will have a knock on effect throughout the economy. During this so-called "economic recovery", 1.1 million more Americans fell into poverty. A total of 37 million, or 12.7 percent of the citizens of the world's richest country now live officially in poverty.

In our 2005 U.S. Perspectives document, produced late last spring, we explained: "It is clear that the equilibrium of the world is extremely unbalanced. Every inch of our planet is affected by the convulsions of an economic and social system in terminal decline. We have often explained that sharp, sudden changes can come at any time, radically and rapidly changing the consciousness of billions of people. War, revolution, counter-revolution, and the brute forces of nature have shaken the world from top to bottom over the past year, and the coming year will be no different. The bitter experience of life under capitalism is forcing millions to seek an alternative to the constant chaos and instability of the profit system. That alternative is workers' democracy and world socialism."

These words ring even truer today. With Katrina, Americans are realizing the full effects of the Iraq war and occupation. A better world is possible: that world is socialism, an economic system run democratically by working people in the interests of all.

Join us in the struggle for a better world! Contact us at:

wil@socialistappeal.org.

www.marxist.com

LABOR DONATED

www.socialistappeal.org